

April 2017

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Recommended Citation

Roney, Tiffany (2017) "Research Scholar: 'Chocolate Pie Guy' Shows How Exercise Affects the Way Our Bodies Process High-fat Meals," *Seek*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1.

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'Chocolate pie guy' shows how exercise affects the way our bodies process high-fat meals

By Tiffany Roney



Nutrition researcher Sam Emerson is gaining a slice of research fame by asking people to eat pie.

Emerson, a doctoral student in food, nutrition, dietetics and health at Kansas State University, and his team had volunteers eat chocolate pie to document effects on glucose, lipids and triglycerides for three groups of people: active adults, ages 18-35; active adults, ages 60-plus; and inactive adults, ages 60-plus.

The researchers found the largest disparities between active and inactive persons, including a 76-year-old runner and an inactive man 10 years younger. The team measured triglycerides, a type of fat in the blood that, at higher levels, can increase the risk of heart disease and signal a metabolic disorder. The inactive man's triglycerides increased more than three times over pre-pie levels, whereas the active man's triglycerides hardly changed. Emerson said these findings show the benefits of a lifetime of physical activity.

"The thread connecting all my studies is the examination of how nutrition and exercise relate to human health in true-to-life situations," Emerson said. "Nourishment and movement have a powerful effect on quality of life."

This spring, Emerson will present the results of the pie study at the K-State Graduate Research, Arts and Discovery Forum and the American College of Sports Medicine's annual meeting. In addition, he will share findings from another study he conducted at the American Society for Nutrition's annual meeting.

Emerson is the primary author of five papers and co-author of eight papers published in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition*, the *British Journal of Nutrition* and other publications.

Emerson earned his bachelor's in nutritional sciences at Oklahoma State University and his master's in kinesiology at K-State, where he was named a distinguished master's student and received the American Kinesiology Association Master's Student National Scholar Award and the American College of Sports Medicine's Master's Student Research Award.

He chose to stay at K-State for his doctoral studies because he wanted to work with Sara Rosenkranz, assistant professor of food, nutrition, dietetics and health.

"Working under Dr. Rosenkranz has helped me see the type of professor I would like to be so that I can guide students and give them opportunities to participate in exciting research," Emerson said. "K-State has allowed me to discover and develop my passion for research while developing my teaching skills as a graduate teaching assistant." **k**